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SUBJECT: PARLIAMENT'S HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE PLANNING MARCH
CONFERENCE ON WOMEN'S ISSUES; SEEKS OPRAH TO GIVE KEYNOTE

1. (SBU) MP and head of Parliament's Human Rights Committee Ali Al-Rashed announced December 10, International Human Rights Day, that he intended to organize a March conference, to coincide with International Women's Day, on human rights with a specific focus on women's issues. During a December 18 meeting with PolChief and LES Political Specialist, he elaborated that he wanted to convene a conference that would bring together Government ministries, parliamentarians, and members of civil society to address human rights; the status of women in Kuwaiti society including violence against women, divorce; and family law. Invited speakers would represent the Gulf, the Arab World, and the broader international community. Speaking "confidentially," Al-Rashed said he had spoken to the Kuwaiti Ambassador to the U.S. about inviting Oprah Winfrey to give the keynote address. He reported that Oprah was popular among Kuwaiti citizens, and her participation would be the encouragement Kuwaiti women needed to become more active politically and socially. He added that he would even change the proposed conference date of March 4, 2006 in order to accommodate the talk show host's schedule.

2. (U) During the early December visit of Coordinator for International Information Programs Alexander Feldman, Post noted Winfrey's popularity and that she would be warmly welcomed in Kuwait. Post recommends that the Department work closely with the Kuwaiti embassy on encouraging a visit to Kuwait.

3. (SBU) Bio Notes: MP Ali Al-Rashed, elected to Parliament in 2003, is an independent liberal. In 2005, he became Chairman of the Human Rights Committee, succeeding Islamist MP Waleed Al-Tabtabaei. Al-Rashed has a BA in Law from Kuwait University and a post-graduate diploma from the Institute for Law and Research Studies, International Arab University. He has worked as a lawyer, public prosecutor, and judge in the Court of First Instance. Part of his legal studies focused on women's political rights and he currently employs one of the two women working on the professional staffs of parliamentarians.

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